Opium poppy cultivation is undertaken in specified tracts only on account of the Central Government and not by any other agency.

In view of the strict control measures and superintendence over areas under poppy cultivation, leakage of opium in any significant quantity has not come to the notice of the Government. There is tight security in the Government opium factories where opium is stored, and no diversion or pilferage from the Government godowns has been reported.

Government have taken all out efforts against possible diversion or pilferage of opium. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (61 of 1985) provides for a mandatory minimum punishment of 10 years' R.I. and a fine of Rs. 1 lakh for offences relating to embezzlement of opium by cultivators or contravention of provisions of that Act in relation to opium poppy and opium.

Earning of Huge profits by Intermediary Processors of Steel

307. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the huge profits being made by the unscrupulous intermediary processors of steel by purchasing the raw material at controlled prices and selling the finished goods in black at a high premium;

(b) if so, what is the procedure for allocating raw material to the processors of steel, the price at which raw material is given to them and the price at which they are supposed to sell the finished goods; and

(c) what is its overall impact on the consumers stating the nature of control, if any, exercised by Government over the processors to check the selling of finished goods at a high premium?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI DINESH GOSWAMI): (a) Sporadic news items have appeared in the past alleging profiteering by some manufacturers of long products but simultaneously the concerned Associations have also countered such allegations.

(b) Supplies to processors at JPC prices are made by the main steel producers of certain designated steel items, as per distribution gudelines framed by the Joint Plant Committee. These, however, constitute a small part of their total requirements. The processors procure the bulk of their requirements from the secondary sector at open market prices.

(c) There is at present no control on the prices of finished products sold by these processors.

Decline in tea production

308. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) what is the percentage fall in the production of tea in the country in the recent past as against the target alongwith the areas where tea production had declined;

(b) to what extent the domestic consumption and export of tea is likely to be affected thereby stating the percentage by which the foreign exchange earnings are likely to fall as a result thereof;

(c) whether Government propose to import tea in order to meet the domestic demand and export obligations; and

(d) if so, what are the details thereof stating the likely impact on the domestic prices of tea as a result thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND TOURISM (SHRI ARUN KUMAR NEHRU): (a) As per the statistics of Tea Board, the percentage fall against the